

Is Taqleed The Only Option For The Common Person?

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Does the common person even have the ability to refer to the proofs of the scholars or is Taqleed (blind following) his only option?

Common people are not all the same when it comes to comprehending the meanings of the texts of the Qur'aan and the Sunnah. The assumption that a common person has absolutely no ability to distinguish between the strength of arguments in two opposing positions of scholars is incorrect. In the words of Shaikh al-Albanee (rahimahullah),

'Scholars do not disagree concerning the obligation upon the common people to imitate their scholars. They are the ones mentioned in the verse, **'And ask the knowledgeable about it.'** [(25):59]

Scholars agree that the blind must follow others, whom he trusts, if he seeks to know the direction of the Qiblah (direction of prayer) when he cannot find it by himself. Likewise, those who are ignorant and are not capable of understanding the religion, have to follow their scholars. Also, the scholars do not disagree on the issue of not allowing the commoner to issue a fatawa. This is because commoners do not understand the meanings of evidences that detail permissible or impermissible acts nor do they know knowledge in general.'

'However, I believe that to generalize about commoners, saying that they all must perform Taqleed, is invalid. Taqleed is following sayings of others without evidence to prove these sayings. Many smart commoners can clearly understand evidence if it is presented to them. Who can deny that a commoner can understand the evidence contained in the Hadeeth, 'Tayammum (performing dry ablution with sand when water is scarce) is one strike (on the sand) for the face and hands!' Even those people, who are of minor comprehension, can understand this Hadeeth. Therefore, the truth is that we must say that Taqleed is allowed for whoever cannot search for or understand the evidence. Allah does not burden any soul but with what it can bear. Ibnul-Qayyim said that which is in agreement with this rule. Even scholars are forced to indulge in Taqleed sometimes, when a scholar cannot find a text from Allaah or His Messenger, but only sayings of more knowledgeable scholars. Therefore, this scholar will be forced to refer to Taqleed. Imam Shafa'ee referred to Taqleed in some matters. This is why Ibnul-Qayyim said, 'And this is the way of people of knowledge. It is also an obligation. Taqleed is permitted for whoever has no other choice. As for those who refer to Taqleed and shun the Qur'aan, the Sunnah, sayings of the companions and searching for evidence, they are like the one, who prefers to eat the meat of a dead animal (not sacrificed according to Islamic Law) to a duly sacrificed animal. Correctly, one must not accept sayings of anyone without proof. Followers of men, made Taqleed, which is the exception, their first priority!' [Al-Hadeeth Hujjah bi-Nafsihi fil-Aqeedah wal-Ahkaam, by Muhammad Nasiruddeen al-Albanee]